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WARD-JOHNSON MELEE

A famous oldtime ring classic took place thirty-five years ago yesterday, Aug. 20, 1885, at Huntington Point, Washington Territory, between Tom Ward and Al Johnson that ended in the thirteenth round, after fifty-five minutes of furious milling.

Ward was seconded by Dick McCarron and Billy McKinney. Johnson had John Donaldson and Charley Burner behind him. Hugh McCormack refereed. The weights were announced as Wards 156 pounds to Johnson's 141 pounds.

Johnson began dancing around his bigger opponent at the call of time, snapping out a fast left to the face and jaw. Ward countered ineffectively with heavy right and left swings for the body, but managed to work an overhand right to the jaw that staggered Johnson. Ward was cornered and sent spinning to the turf when Johnson feinted fast for the stomach with his left and then, quicker than a flash, hooked his right to the point of the jaw.

Instead of giving the men one minute's rest, the referee ordered them out after ten seconds had elapsed. Ward had not recovered from the hard knockdown of the previous round and staggered out with blood dripping from his mouth and nose. Johnson was all over his man in an instant and pounded Ward from rope to rope with head smashes with both fists. Ward was practically out on his feet when Johnson crashed him to the ground with a right hook into the body that drove the wind out of his lungs. He lay stretched out gasping for breath and had to be carried to his corner.

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When time was called for the third round Ward had to be lifted from his stool and led to the centre of the ring. Johnson tried hard to knock his man out, but Ward was extremely game and toward the end of the round started to slug back. Johnson had him on Queer Street, but a long clinch saved Ward from a knockout.

Ward dived into a clinch at the call of time for the fourth round. As the referee separated them, Ward stepped in with two hard smashes to the face that drew the blood from Johnson's nose and mouth. A claim of foul by Johnson's seconds that Ward had bitten their man in the clinch was not allowed by the referee and the two men started to exchange blows. Ward was knocked spinning from a left hook to the chin, but jumped to his feet, refusing a count, and sent Johnson down in a heap when he uncorked a wild right haymaker that landed flush on the jaw. Johnson took a count of nine before getting to his feet. He met Ward's rush with a stiff right to the heart that sent Ward down. He took a count of seven, but the bell saved him from further punishment.

Ward was led out to scratch by one of his seconds at the beginning of the fifth round. Johnson came up, full of life, but was sent reeling around the ring when Ward struck out blindly with his right and landed behind the left ear. For three full minutes the two stood toe to toe swapping blows; Ward getting stronger all the time, Johnson weaker, his nose and mouth bleeding badly.

Ward broke his right hand in the sixth round when he missed a swing and landed on a ring-post. He could not close his fist and had to be content with slapping with his open hand. He managed to close Johnson's right eye with some hard left jabs and was by far

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the stronger of the two at the end.

From the seventh to the eleventh rounds it was even. First one then the other gaining a temporary advantage, only to have the other rush in and even things. Johnson was knocked to his hands and knees in the eleventh round from a wicked right hand chop under the heart. Both their right eyes were closed tight and their mouths and noses bleeding when they came up for the twelfth round.

Ward came out with a rush and, before Johnson could get his hands in place, swung both fists for the head. Johnson fell back and landed in a sitting position on his stool, which had not been taken from the ring. His seconds immediately surrounded him and held Ward away while they sliced with a pen-knife under and above his bad eye in an effort to reduce the swelling. Johnson was practically out on his feet and begged his seconds to throw in the sponge, as he was almost blind. Ward was tottering about the ring, meanwhile, too tired to stand erect, but game to the core. After a few seconds a sponge came flying into the ring from Johnson's corner and the fight awarded to Ward.

Johnson's own version of this fight was as follows:

We both were eager to fight and did not wait for the timekeeper. I drove my right into his stomach and we clinched for several minutes. I then sidestepped, hit him in the neck and scored a knockdown. This was round one.

Time was called after 10 seconds. Again I worked on his stomach and scored a second knockdown from a body blow in about two minutes. They carried Ward to his corner. I had the fight won then, but call of time and a rest of two minutes (instead of one) saved him and gave the disabled man another chance. This was clearly against the rules. This was round two.

Ward felt the effects of my blows even with the extra allowance of time, his seconds had trouble getting him on his feet to continue the struggle. I came over to him and landed another blow.. This reeled him helpless on the ropes. Another blow like that would have finished and might have killed him but fortunately for Ward time was called, I had to desist and he was carried to his corner. I consider I was cheated out of the decision again. This was round three.

Then my seconds advised me not to lead with stomach blows, but work on his neck. This was poor judgment on their part. After a few more rounds Ward recovered, started to foul and butt in clinches.

In the 13th round I was blind.

The report that I asked to have the fight stopped is not correct. My seconds thought best to do so and they threw up the sponge.

Ward shook hands with me and was trying to pass the hat for the loser, but he was too weak, he gave the hat to another man and took hold of the ropes. His seconds had to lead him to his corner and put his clothes on him.

After we arrived back in Astoria Ward was put in his room and was unconscious. His neck was swollen and he could not breathe. A doctor put a tube in his throat to give him air, put leaches on his neck and pumped blood out of his ear. He was unconscious until 4:00 o'clock the next morning.

However, Ward was a game man. In about two months he fought Larry Sullivan in the same ring Jack Dempsey knocked out Dave Campbell in three rounds. Sullivan and Ward fought more than 70 rounds. Sullivan, even with his superior skill in boxing, could not hurt Ward. He was afraid to mix. Ward was too slow to catch Sullivan. It was a draw.

After my Ward affair I was willing to fight him again. I had plenty of backers, even Russian Bob was willing to back me two to one, from $500 to $1000, but found no takers. Yes - sure - I was used up considerably too; both of us had broken right hands and very swollen faces. George Hill backed Ward for his $100. Ward himself saw only $10.00 of this. He even bought a bottle of wine with this and presented it to me several days after the fight. Ward told me himself that I should have had the decision. There was no ill feeling between us at any time.

Eight years after the Ward-Johnson affair - that is 1893.

Larry Sullivan, the sailor boarding house runner of Astoria, got to be very overbearing.

and a fight was arranged to take place in Trullinger's Electric Power house fitted up for the occasion.

It was one of "the" events in the general rough routine of doings in Astoria.

The witnessing of this affair was very indelibly inscribed on the Historian's mind.

Sullivan, the heavier of the two, with an air of overbearing bravado bordering on a display of uncalled for mockery against his opponent, such as making faces, backing away with an air of ridicule, and grin etc.

Johnson - well, let me tell you

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- and, you should have seen Johnson stripped -

Sullivan himself well built, a splendid boxer. However, Johnson was the very picture of strength and motion - built like a wedge - broad shoulders, small feet, ~~with~~ blacksmith like arms and fists that reminded of sledge hammers - well - Johnson simply went after Sullivan wholse grinning face quickly changed to a sober mien - then serious, and one hit from Johnson's right sledgehammer fist floored the arrogant - Yes, it was Johnson's round - and one was enough.

Affairs of this kind always create an air of disappointment to the losers and especially the money losers in betting.

There is always talk of fake, selling out - pre-arranged - double crossing and what not, following any affairs of this kind.

All these rumors must be taken with a grain of understanding as to human nature. Yes, I have witnessed half-hearted affairs - but there was no sign of any half-heartedness in the Sullivan -Johnson affair.